



POSTCOLONIAL WRITINGS AND THE REMAINS OF BRITISH COLONIALISM

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ABSTRACT

British colonialism remains a significant event till date in the pages of world history, more so in the histories of its ex-colonies. Colonialism was not just military and political. It was first of all cultural. Manipulation of minds and knowledge was a major and primary strategy in the power of the British Empire that managed to rule over, and exploit more than half of the world. The post-independence scenario has given rise to the school of Post colonialism whose agenda is to talk back/write back to the Empire. Post colonialism aims at questioning, subverting and rereading the colonial discourses and forms of knowledge, Western constructs, stereotypes about the East and breaking down of hierarchies. But this attempt at cultural and cerebral independence has proved to be a really challenging and almost impossible task to be achieved. Post colonialism and its ideas have not remained static towards its approach to and production of knowledge. It has evolved and changed. Old ideas have been challenged and replaced by new ones. However, Post colonialism in its pursuit of authentic presentations and representations of the endless micro-narratives of 'the other' has at times been caught committing the same appropriations and misinterpretations against which it fights. The effects of colonialism have seeped in so deep into the histories and knowledge of its colonies that a proper decolonisation of the mind has turned hard to achieve. This paper attempts to point out some such lingering effects of colonialism that have remained as gaps in Post colonialism's efforts at decolonising the mind.

KEYWORDS: Colonialism, English, Effects, Postcoloniality, Post colonialism, Gaps.

INTRODUCTION:

The presence of English Studies in the academic curriculum of the Third world countries is one of the results of British colonisation. If the British had not colonised half the globe, the academic scenario would have been different. Critics like Gauri Viswanathan have argued that the introduction of English Studies in its colonies was an ideological strategy of British colonial administration (Ashcroft et al., 2002). In their book *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. notes that "the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other..." (Ashcroft et al., 2002). This parallel development had succeeded to impose immense effects upon the whole existence of the population of the colonies. The introduction of English Studies in the colonies marked "the juncture at which native populations came to internalise the ideological procedures of the colonial civilising mission" (Gandhi, 1998). Thus, along with geographical and political colonisation, the British also colonised "minds, selves, cultures" (Gandhi, 1998) through the introduction of Western knowledge and technological benefits of modernity. This colonisation of the minds "survives the demise of empires" (Nandy, 2009). Even after decades of the downfall of the political British empire, its cultural colonisation still continues in various incarnations in its former colonies. Although various alterations and modifications have been made to suit the post-independence situation, English Studies continue to exist in the curriculum and universities of the postcolonial nations. Various justifications have been provided regarding the incorporation, use and predominance of English language and English studies in the postcolonial situation. Besides the necessity of English as a global lingua franca, one major justification in this regard provided by postcolonialists is that English is no more the coloniser's language. It has been subverted, divided and distributed. So, English no longer remains exclusive to England and English no longer indicates English power. Because, English used in the postcolonial situation has been fused with the native languages and distorted to lose the coloniser's cultural authority. English literature on the other hand, under study in the postcolonial situation is often made to be dissected and analysed for the production of counter-narratives and micro-narratives in order to break the colonial hierarchies of knowledge and construction.

Postcolonial Studies have emerged as a reaction to the colonial experience and its aftermath. Postcolonial writings in English are justified as an act of writing back to the empire by appropriating the use of the English language. "Standard' British English inherited from the empire" has been appropriated and altered to challenge and deconstruct the structure of colonialism (Ashcroft et al., 2002). This situation appears to be a bit paradoxical and ironic, because Postcolonial writings in English have contributed to the expansion and development of English Studies, which itself is after all a continuation of a part of the academic structure left by colonialism. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has reacted to it by advocating the abolition of English Departments from African education system. In their attempts to subvert colonial and Western forms of knowledge by breaking down "hierarchies of knowledge" (Gandhi, 1998), providing alternative perspectives and voices to the rigid colonial constructions and debunking West's attempts at generalising the cultures and values of the non-West, Postcolonial writings, however, have not been able to overcome certain gaps in between. Decolonization of minds and cul-

tures has proved to be more complicated and harder than achieving independence from political colonisation. The burdens of "colonial inheritance" are difficult to be disowned (Gandhi, 1998). This paper attempts to look into a few of such gaps in Postcolonial writings in English – gaps that point to the remains of the colonial thoughts and that show the continuation of colonisation of the minds by European forms of knowledge.

1.1 Post colonial texts and the question of representation:

Postcolonial writers aim at deconstructing colonial and Western constructs of the non-West by being true to the presentation and representation of colonial and postcolonial situations. Their ways of telling stories of the past try to allow scope for former subdued micro narratives to emerge, to acknowledge variations, to let space for interpretations to emerge and not to limit with close ended, generalised, constructed conclusions. However, questions arise regarding the achievement of such well-aimed intentions. How far is the representation provided by these writings able to voice the represented? In their attempts to breakdown constructs and appropriations, do these writers not fall into similar traps of constructing and appropriating the represented? Does the polemical nature of these writings make them fall prey to the dangers of generalisation? For instance, in their critique of Western feminists' representations of non-Western women, postcolonial critics like Spivak and Mohanty, end up committing similar constructions of women as the "bearer of meanings/experiences" (Gandhi, 1998).

Postcolonialism, ironically has emerged from and developed in the universities of the West. Most postcolonial writers – theorists, novelists, historiographers – from Said to Bhabha, have developed their studies from within the academic scenario of the First world. This brings to light the problem of representation and theorising. There occurs a difference between postcolonial theory/ "postcolonialism" and the condition of "postcoloniality" (Gandhi, 1998). Postcolonialism is ideological while postcoloniality refers to the postcolonial situation, as defined by L. Gandhi. This drain of the Third world intellectual section to the First world creates a gap between experience and theorising and raises questions about the authenticity and validity of their theories and representations. Discussing Arif Dirlik's and Aijaz Ahmad's critique on such matters, Leela Gandhi notes: For both critics, postcolonial theorising is – like bourgeois interiority – a matter of class or, in this case, institutional privilege (Gandhi, 1998). Echoing Ahmad, Gandhi states that postcolonial theorising, "is a luxury based upon the availability of 'mobility and surplus pleasure' to a privileged few, while the vast majority of the others are condemned to labour 'below the living standards of the colonial period'. In other words, while postcolonial subjects must work to stay alive, postcolonial intellectuals are free to partake 'of a carnivalesque collapse and play of identities'..." (Gandhi, 1998). Such differences between the location of the postcolonial writers working from within the academies of the First world and the location of their topics of writing, that is, the Third world and its postcoloniality, reflect the possibility of gaps in postcolonial theories and writings. Lack of the insider's experience of postcoloniality makes theorising and representation prone to the formation of constructs and misinterpretations. The difference in location of the postcolonial writer and the postcolonial subject who is to be represented or theorised about, creates a difference in experience which stands as an obstacle to the validity of the postcolonial texts. A short period of

field study cannot substitute for the lifelong experience that should be essential for theorising and authentic representation. Under such circumstances, the analytical reader cannot help but question – how far is the critique of postcolonial thinkers regarding colonial and Western constructs and representations of the non-West valid, when, the authenticity of postcolonialism's attempt at representing postcoloniality is itself questionable?

1.2 The danger of binaries:

One of the primary motives of the postcolonial writers is to undo and avoid constructed binaries. But close study of texts reveals that many writers fall into this trap of binary formation and also give in to certain constructs that colonial discourse and the West formed about the non-West in order to rationalise their own 'superior' position-mature/immature, civilised/barbaric, developed/developing, progressive/primitive, (Gandhi, 1998) masculine/effeminate, scientific/religious, rational/superstitious, etc. To make this point more clear, this paper takes instances from Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *Kanthapura* has often been praised for its ideal presentation of the Indian society inspired by Gandhian ideals of anti colonial protests. However, Moorthy's attempts at uniting all sections of people by preaching Gandhian ideals of brotherhood and equality cannot drive away the caste segregation from the participants' minds. While taking their vows of following the ideals of Gandhi at the temple:

one here and one there went up before the sanctum, rang the bell and said, 'My Master, I shall spin a hundred yards of yarn per day, and I shall practice ahimsa, and I shall seek Truth,' and they fell prostrate and asked for the blessings of the Mahatma and the gods, and they rose and crawled back to their seats. But when it comes to the pariahs, Ranchanna says, 'We shall stand out here and take the vows,' and at this Moorthy is so confused that he does not know what to do... (Rao, 1989)

Moorthy, the preacher of equality, himself cannot get rid of these caste prejudices. On his first visit to the pariah quarters, his mind remains occupied by the constructed thoughts about the pariah quarters. Moorthy's reaction is that of disgust:

he looks this side and that and thinks surely there is a carcass in the backyard, and it's surely being skinned, and he smells the stench of hide and the stench of pickled pigs, and the roof seems to shake, and all the gods and all the manes of heaven seem to cry out against him, and his hands steal mechanically to the holy thread, and holding it, he feels he would like to say, 'Hari-Om, Hari-Om.' (Rao, 1989)

Even after his return, Moorthy cannot get rid of such prejudices of caste binaries.

Rangamma says only, 'I shall at least give you a little Ganges water, and you can take a spoonful of it each time you've touched them, can't you?' So Moorthy says, 'As you will,' and taking the Ganges water he feels a fresher breath flowing through him, and lest anyone should ask about his new adventure, he goes to the riverside after dinner to sit and think and pray. After all a brahmin is a brahmin, sister! (Rao, 1989)

The nationalist anti colonial gatherings become more of a religious gathering and Gandhi takes up the place of Krishna or Shiva. The society of *Kanthapura* turns out not to be a multi-religious one but rather an exclusively Hindu one that tends to cast aside other religions. T. J Abraham notes:

One wonders where a non-Hindu would have been if there be such a one, in *Kanthapura*, as temples are forbidden ground for non-Hindus. Can he or she even hope, in such a scheme, to be integrated into the centre of anticolonial struggle? (Abraham, 2003)

Despite the possibilities of the presence of postcolonial subversions in *Kanthapura*, the existence of such binary formations cannot be denied. Such descriptions, tend to cater to the colonial perceptions of the non-West, here India, as 'primitive', 'superstitious' and 'religious', etc. Representation of the binaries of the Indian situation directly or indirectly affirms the Western constructed binaries.

Similar instances, can also be found in *Things Fall Apart*. The novel is one among the most discussed post colonial texts. Certain descriptions about the Igbo society and Igbo rituals appear to be larger than life. For instance, Achebe's description of the *egwugwu* (Achebe, 2001).

Aru oyim de de de dei! flew around the dark, closed hut like tongues of fire. The ancestral spirits of the clan were aboard... And then the *egwugwu* appeared. The women and children sent up a great shout and took to their heels. It was instinctive... Each of the nine *egwugwu* represented a village of the clan. Their leader was called Evil Forest. Smoke poured out of his head... (Achebe, 2001)

However, the nine *egwugwu* were actually masked men.

Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed

that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu*. But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves. The *egwugwu* with the springy walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan. (Achebe, 2001)

This throws light on the planned and classified strategies adopted by the Igbo society to instigate fear and awe in order to maintain particular order in their society. But such description also raises question about the superstitions prevalent in such societies. Do societies, such as the Igbo society described by Achebe, operate based upon the ignorance and superstitions of its members and cunning of the rulers of the community? Along this line of thought, Leela Gandhi talks about the consensual participation of the intellectuals from the First and the Third worlds in forming "exotic cultures" (Gandhi, 1998). Although Rao and Achebe may not have intended to participate in such formations, certain descriptions in their novels, as the above instances, however, tend to leave room for such formations. Colonialism advocated the "dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity" (Nandy, 2009). So, gender biases can be said to follow such colonial thought. Many feminists critics accuse Achebe of such gendered affinities. Andrea Powell, in her discussion of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, comments:

Achebe consistently side-lines the place of the postcolonial woman in order to focus on postcolonial manhood. Woman's lives often serve as little more than fodder for the exploration of masculinity. (Powell, 2008)

1.3 Continued dependency on Western forms of knowledge:

Ashcroft et al. states that "The idea of 'post-colonial literary theory' emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing" (Ashcroft et al., 2002). However, postcolonialism is "methodologically and conceptually indebted to a variety of both earlier and more recent 'Western theories'" (Gandhi, 1998). Postcolonialism does not mean exclusively anti colonial. It incorporates various ideas and forms of knowledge and is interdisciplinary. Because rejection will lead to binary formation. But, postcolonial theories incorporate Western theories to a considerable degree. Postcolonialism can be said to depend heavily upon the Western theories in order to justify and validate its own thoughts and arguments. Post modernism, post structuralism, Derrida and Foucault have become unavoidable in postcolonial studies. The Western theories and philosophies upon which postcolonialism depends were however formulated without proper knowledge of the whole of the human population (Chakrabarty, 1992). "Derrida's and Foucault's work does not really address the problem of colonialism directly" (Gandhi, 1998). From this observation it can be questioned – can these Western philosophies and theories that were formed upon a basically European context, be satisfactorily used to validate and describe the conditions of a very different context of postcoloniality? Also, postcoloniality is itself a heterogeneous condition. So, is there not a chance of falling prey to generalisation and homogenisation while using the same theories for different contexts? Nandy notes:

Let us not forget that the most violent denunciation of the West produced by Frantz Fanon is written in the elegant style of a Jean- Paul Sartre. The West has not merely produced modern colonialism, it informs most interpretations of colonialism. It colours even this interpretation of interpretation. (Nandy, 2009)

The Western thinkers, philosophers, writers, theorists and historiographers, on the other hand, can even do without reciprocating. Such instances only point to the continued colonisation of the minds by European forms of knowledge.

CONCLUSION:

Just as postcoloniality carries the burden of the colonial past, postcolonialism too cannot empty itself of the coloniser's and the West's knowledge. Postcolonialism's attempts at re-reading, re-defining the past and breaking down Western constructs of the non-West, consist of complexities and puzzles. In this process, there is a constant threat of getting drawn into the very ideologies that postcolonialism attempts to challenge and deconstruct. Postcolonialism at certain junctures may even end up forming constructed images and ideas of the West. Postcolonial writings, in both deconstructing colonial and western knowledge and in unintentionally continuing the impacts of colonial knowledge, end up giving attention to the history of colonisation. Presentation and representation of postcoloniality completely devoid of the influence of western knowledge have proved to be difficult and almost impossible task. Because, English, although amputated, hybridised and nativized, still continue to remain the lingua franca and even the official language in most part of the previously British-colonised world. Independence and decolonisation have therefore remained limited only at political level. An exchange of political power then, is what defines independence from the British Raj. Decolonisation of the mind still remains a continuous process. The existence of English language in the postcolonial nations and dependence on Western knowledge, although nativized and modified, mark the lingering existence of the Raj. Hybridity has become the new native. Decolonisation of the minds and cultures of the postcolonial nations has turned into a harder and more complicated task to be achieved with the new impacts of globalisation and neo-colonialism. Postcolonialism faces double challenge in subverting west-

ern hierarchies of knowledge with the additional influences of America as the new global empire.

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